Town of Norvelt
(Westmoreland Homesteads)
Norvelt
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5921

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF NORVELT
(Westmoreland Homesteads)

HABS No. PA-5921

Location: Norvelt
Westmoreland County (southern half)
Pennsylvania

Significance: A subsistence homestead, the Town of Norvelt was developed as part of a broad reaching effort of the New Deal era intended to relieve the dire economic rural conditions which existed in the 1930s. Sponsored and subsidized by the U.S. government, the construction of Norvelt was supervised by the American Friends Service Committee. As an experiment in environmental and social reform, Norvelt was meant to improve the standard of living through the design of practical small houses and the implementation of a landscape plan for rural communities.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1934-36

2. **Architect:** The community and houses were designed by Paul A. Bartholomew. Born in Greensburg, Bartholomew established his architectural practice there in 1912, and evidently prospered. Before the Depression, his major commissions included the Classical Revival-style YMCA in Greensburg and a sprawling Tudor-style mansion for stockbroker Charles McKenna Lynch (now University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg's Lynch Hall).[1] The government contracted with Bartholomew on January 9, 1934, to lay out Westmoreland Homesteads (cost: $600), provide preliminary studies and working drawings of eight to ten houses ($85 per unit), and design the layout of each plot ($15 each).[2] Later, Bartholomew was contracted to design the school, store, tea room, gas station, and repair shop at Norvelt.

3. **Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses, alterations and additions:** Various changes have been made to Norvelt in the past fifty years. By 1952 the cooperatives were gone, including the poultry and dairy farms, and community center. The town's appearance has been somewhat altered, as well, with macadam streets, additions to houses, property subdivisions, and completely new structures. The growth of trees and shrubbery has produced a leafy, appealing neighborhood. Although there are some vegetable gardens, the focus now seems to be on ornamental gardens, as cultivated flower beds decorate many of the yards. The old high school building has been converted to offices, the old construction office is a funeral home, and numerous businesses have sprung up along the main road.

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[1]John A. Sakal, et al., "A Photographic Survey of Westmoreland County Architecture," Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, 1979; James D. VanTrump, "Mansion's Charm, Integrity Preserved," Greensburg Tribune-Review: Focus, September 22, 1985. The small Tudor-style house that Bartholomew designed for himself still stands at 208 Kenneth St., Greensburg. Bartholomew's successor firm, Roach Walfish Lettrich, is still a prominent architectural firm in Greensburg.

[2]Contract between P.A. Bartholomew, architect, and Westmoreland Homesteads, Inc., Box 28, Farm Security Administration files, Record Group 207, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

Most notable are the numbers of new houses, testifying to the popularity of Norvelt. Many are constructed between the old houses, and others on lots behind the original houses. New subdivisions on the edges of Norvelt also illustrate the community's attraction.

Many residents, both old and new, have made changes to the small Cape Cod dwellings. After Betty and Simon Somers bought their four-room house in 1942, they enclosed the porch to create more room. "The houses were small," said Betty, "and uninsulated. They were cold, but a lot of other places were cold. We were proud of it. Don't think we weren't proud of it." Eventually, the Somerses built and moved into a large ranch house on the rear of their property, and rented the four-room house to another family. Similarly, Mary Wolk gave a portion of her three-acre property to son Joseph and his wife, Valeria, who built a house in the 1940s. Both grew up in Norvelt, "and loved it enough to stay when they got married."[3]

Other families have remained in Norvelt, as well. Jay Hoffer--whose homesteader father, Wallace, was the first barber--still lives there, as does his daughter Sandy. Steve Whisdosh, who succeeded his mother, Agnes, as Norvelt's postmaster, also divided the family homestead and built a new house behind his childhood home; the original house is occupied by his daughter.

B: Historical Context:

The federal government selected Mount Pleasant Township, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, as the site of its new homestead project, and on April 13, 1934, officially acquired the first tracts of land from the heirs of James P. Hurst.[4] Located eight miles southeast of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and thirty-eight miles southeast of Pittsburgh, the Hurst farm was surrounded by idle mines. Owned and operated primarily by the H. C. Frick Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of the U.S. Steel Corporation, each mine had an associated cluster of company-owned houses called a "patch." With its mines closed or operating on a reduced scale, and with hundreds of miners stranded in its patches, Mount Pleasant Township provided the perfect laboratory for a rehabilitation project to be called Westmoreland Homesteads, renamed Norvelt in 1937.

The federal homestead projects gave families an opportunity to start over again, to develop new skills, to learn self-reliance, and to regain self-confidence. But the government made no promises; the homesteads were experimental, and families were expected to work hard and do their share to make the communities a success. In his "Message to Friends and Neighbors in Mount Pleasant Township," David W. Day, community manager at Westmoreland Homesteads, explained:

> The families privileged to live here are here, not by special favor, but for the purpose of demonstrating in the highest measure possible, the advantages and possibilities of Cooperative Community life as a means of making all life richer and more abundant . . . Westmoreland Homesteads is not considered to be the complete answer to the problem of insecurity for even a small group of families, but it does represent a

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[3]Betty Somers; Mary Wolk.

[4]Fifty Years of Progress.

genuine effort and a start in the proper direction, i.e., to lay the foundations of opportunity whereby people with no previous hope for the future may help themselves.[5]

Only 29 years old, Day was a Quaker social worker from Indiana whose considerable enthusiasm and talent led to his selection over other qualified candidates for the position as community manager. In that capacity, he oversaw the construction of 250 houses by their future occupants; he helped select the homesteaders from hundreds of unemployed miners; and he encouraged subsistence gardening, industrial development, and formation of cooperative associations as means of giving the unemployed the wherewithal to become self-sufficient.

THE HOMESTEADERS

Many local miners wanted to live in the new project. Applications poured in from Mammoth, Hecla, United, Whitney, Weltytown, Calumet, Standard and other Pennsylvania patches. In accordance with the government's standards, preference was given to families on relief, with children, with garden or farming experience, or with some other combination of factors. In all, 1,850 families applied; only 254 were chosen.

These families were intended to represent a cross section of the mining population of Westmoreland County. A 1940 survey of the accepted families revealed that 85 percent were American born, and more than 75 percent of those were born in Pennsylvania. The average family was composed of 5.5 persons including 3.3 children, and the average age of the father was 39. About two-thirds of the families earned less than $1,000 annually and were on some form of economic relief before applying, and about 40 percent of heads of households had been employed as miners.[6] But there were exceptions.

Chauncey and Helen White were renting a small house near Mount Pleasant when they read an advertisement for Westmoreland Homesteads in the newspaper which "told all about how people could buy a home, and we liked that very much. We had children and wanted a nice home where they could get a good education." Like hundreds of other families, the Whites submitted an application. When no response came, they submitted another--and another, and another. They went to meetings all over the township, but because the Whites were black, they were continually rebuffed. "We wanted a home. That's what we were fighting and pushing for," said Helen. Finally, the Whites appealed their case to a higher authority; they wrote a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt. Despite "obstacles and the disapproval of many," the Whites and their six children moved into Westmoreland Homesteads in 1936. According to their daughter, Norma Williams, "It was alright after everyone got to know us. We led a pretty quiet and happy life here."[7]

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[5]A Tribute to Norvelt and Her First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt: Fifty Years of Progress. (Norvelt: privately printed, 1987).

[6]Ward Beckwith, "Westmoreland Homesteads after Five Years of Growth" (Norvelt, 1940), 7.

[7]Helen White, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 30 June 1989, Norvelt; Norma White Williams quoted in Greensburg Tribune Review, 15 November 1988.

Looking back, Helen White remarked, "We were all poor, working-class people. Most families had children and wanted to be near schools." In that respect, she said, "Everyone was just like us." Black or white, employed or unemployed, Westmoreland homesteaders shared a strong sense of identity and comraderie during the early years. Management believed, "A certain community cohesiveness was imperative to the successful establishment and permanent operation of a new community of this type."[8] Much of the initial "community cohesiveness" derived from the construction of the houses, but the visual cohesion is due to their designs.

Mary Wolk has lived in Norvelt for more than fifty years and is one of the community's original homesteaders. Like most of the initial residents, Wolk and her husband, Anthony, applied for a government house hoping to improve their situation. The Wolks and their three children had previously lived in Whitney, a small coal community near Mount Pleasant. A miner, Anthony Wolk had been only partially employed through the 1920s, and completely unemployed for four years prior to 1934. The family had no money, having lost their small savings in 1929, and could not qualify for state or federal relief unless they sold their insurance policy first. The situation looked grim but "then Roosevelt was elected and God bless him and his family."[9]

Families were assigned houses on the basis of how many children they had. Mary and Anthony Wolk had three children when they applied to live in Westmoreland Homesteads and so qualified for a five-room house. When their fourth child was born, the Wolks moved to a six-room house. Comparing her former residence, one side of a semi-detached house in Whitney, to her six-room Norvelt home, Mary Wolk remarked, "Oh, my company house couldn't stand along side this. It's so private. Our neighbors are so far that we have privacy, but close enough if you need anything. To us, it was a heaven. We never had an inside bathroom."[10]

CONSTRUCTION

At Westmoreland Homesteads, the future homesteaders participated in the construction of the houses. In this manner the homesteader's labor was treated as equity on the property, thereby reducing the actual cost of house and land. A man was expected to contribute three days' labor to the project per week. The homesteaders earned $4 to $5 in cash one day, and credit toward the purchase price of the home during the other two. The men were aided in the construction work by a ten-man government engineering and administrative force and fifty volunteer college students sent by the AFSC each summer.[11]

The selection of home sites and construction of houses at the Westmoreland County homestead were under way by April 1934. According to a local newspaper, the government had established a workshop on the property for carpentry, iron working, tin smithing, and other trades "useful in the erection and upkeep of subsistence homes." This workshop was located in an old garage behind the farmhouse, which served as the construction office. The office at Westmoreland Homesteads reported

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[8]Beckwith, 7.

[9]Mary Wolk, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, June 1989, Norvelt.

[10]Mary Wolk.

[11]Greensburg Morning Review, 2 August 1934.

directly to the main construction office in Washington for materials, timekeeping, and paychecks. S. Howard Pennell of the AFSC in Philadelphia was brought in from Arthurdale to supervise the shop, where homesteaders made shutters, window and door frames, and cupboards. The builders took advantage of the number of houses being built to mass produce various elements. One original settler recalled how a supply crew would arrive, followed closely by the carpenters, roofers, plumbers, electricians and plasterers, and shortly thereafter, a new house stood on what had just been a vacant lot.[12]

By summer 1935, twenty houses were occupied and construction of the community was progressing rapidly. Previously, both officials and homesteaders had agreed upon 1,200 credit hours as the maximum amount an individual could accrue while working on the project. When several of the homesteaders reached that amount, however, they did not want to give up their jobs. The more the men worked, the more credit they earned toward the cost of their homes. On the other hand, the demand for jobs was far greater than the number available. At the time, 228 families had been accepted, but only 100 family heads were employed by the homestead.[13] Community Manager David Day attempted to find a solution that did not involve lay-offs: the men should go on working, receiving pay for half their time, and credit hours for the remainder. The credit hours would go into a community pot and be applied toward payment of the project's outstanding federal loan.

At that, the situation erupted into open conflict, with settlers and management divided. Many vehemently protested Day's decision, demanding not only to receive a full day's wage, but to be paid the prevailing rate of 50 cents an hour for unskilled labor. Officials in Washington, busy orchestrating transfer of the division to the Resettlement Administration, turned a deaf ear to Westmoreland County. Frustrated by the lack of response, the homesteaders finally sent three representatives to Washington with a petition calling for Day's dismissal. Local newspapers publicized the conflict: "One For All Theory Fails to Work Out in County Experiment"; "Homesteaders Demand Prevailing Wage, Ask Tugwell To Fire Day."[14] Day, meanwhile, maintained that he was merely a "scapegoat for the settlers," and that the problem was simply a result of the stress of making the experiment work.

The government sought a middle course, acquiescing to homesteaders' demands; they would be paid more money and keep their jobs, but Day would keep his job, as well. The division absolved Day of all blame, stating that the situation was a result of "circumstances beyond his control." Moreover, the three homesteaders who had led the fight for Day's dismissal were ousted from the community. According to the newspapers, the threesome had attached a second petition to the first, without the consent or knowledge of the rest of the community, and which made "unsubstantiated charges" against Day. Altbough the problem appeared resolved, similar disagreements between Day

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[12]Greensburg Morning Review, 13 April 1934; "Our Community Booster Day," 4; Fifty Years of Progress; Greensburg Morning Review, 13 April 1934, 20 April 1934, 2 August 1934; Joseph Conwill, "Back to the Land! Pennsylvania's New Deal Era Communities," Pennsylvania Heritage 10 (Summer 1984): 14.

[13]Greensburg Morning Review, 8 June 1935.

[14]Greensburg Morning Review, 8 June 1935.

and the cooperative specialist would eventually force the division to dismiss Day in November 1936.[15]

Although one of the primary concerns with construction was to keep costs down, the houses at Norvelt were more expensive than both the government and the homesteaders desired. Because the final cost of the houses could not be determined until construction was complete, homesteaders were permitted to occupy and rent their houses, with an option to buy, once the purchase price had been set. Rents--which were $12.65 per month for a four-room house, $13.50 for a five-room, and $14.33 for a six-room--would be credited against the purchase price. The cost of the farmsteads, including land, houses, utilities, and credit hours paid as cash, as well as indirect costs of planning, administration, and construction items, averaged $3,760 per unit. The cost of the community buildings, land, and roads, with indirect costs, added another $2,763 per unit. The homesteaders were unable to afford this, so the sale price was based on what they could afford to pay. A projected annual income of $1,000 was partly provided by the subsistence garden, so that the annual cash income was estimated at $850. One-fourth of this, $212.50 (or $17.70 per month), was thought a fair price for mortgage payments, which over forty years at 3 percent interest came to $2,131.28 that the government would receive for its houses. Thus only about one-third of the cost of the homesteads would be recouped.[16]

THE COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

Employment problems were exacerbated throughout the 1930s as more families on relief continued to apply for houses at Westmoreland Homesteads. The division realized that once accepted, families on relief could not be cut off immediately; it was necessary to continue financial aid until the homesteaders could support themselves independently. For the most part, employment on the project, such as clearing land, grading streets, and building houses filled the bill. By working on the project, homesteaders were earning their keep, not receiving handouts. As only 40 percent of the heads of household had outside employment, most were dependent on construction work as their livelihood. As the division explained, "Every effort is made in this work to develop skills formerly not possessed by the homesteaders and to complete worthwhile community developments and improvements."[17] With this approach, the government stressed self-sufficiency from the beginning of the project. But as the project neared completion, it became obvious to officials that another means of economic support was needed.

Although not intended as the sole source of income, the government encouraged subsistence gardens. Each homestead contained between one and seven acres where the family was expected to raise its own vegetables, fruit, poultry, and perhaps a cow or hog. According to homesteader Mary Wolk, "It was possible to live off the gardens and chickens. We did it until things picked up and the men went back to work [in the mines]." The emphasis was to be on home consumption, not market

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[15]Greensburg Morning Review, 11 June 1935, 15 June 1935; Miscellaneous correspondence from David Day, Indiana, to the AFSC, Philadelphia, Pa., AFSC Archives.

[16]"Our Community Booster Day," 15; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Resettlement Administration, Resettlement Division, "Justification for Westmoreland Homesteads, SH-PA-3" (26 May 1937), Box 51, Public Housing Administration, Record Group 207, National Archives.

[17]Circular 1, 11; "Justification"; Beckwith, 7.

sale, although some families were able to sell surplus. Homesteader Agnes Whisdosh, for instance, drove to Latrobe every morning to sell extra produce. Chickens were considered another element of the subsistence program, for the hens and eggs could be consumed and sold but, "Nothing was free. Not even the chickens." Repayment for the chickens began when they reached maturity. Each family had a chicken coop and twenty-five to fifty chicks as part of the total homestead package. Baby chicks were raised on the farm in a chicken range billed as the "largest commercial poultry plant in Pennsylvania," and then distributed to each family.[18]

The Westmoreland Homesteads Cooperative Association, later known as Westmoreland Homesteads Community Enterprises, Inc., was created as part of the federal government's plan to provide employment for the community. Organized as an affiliation of all homesteaders, the purpose of the Community Association was to establish agricultural and community trading facilities. By lending the association $370,000 for the establishment of business activities, the government could indirectly provide employment, and thus fulfill its goal of economic rehabilitation.[19]

The cooperative association operated a hog farm, beef farm, and dairy barn that sold fresh meat, dairy and poultry products to outside firms on a contract basis. All the money raised went back into the farm for maintenance and repayment of the community's federal loans. The farm itself operated on a five-year rotation plan to produce corn, oats, barley or wheat each of three years, and alfalfa for two years. This system, devised with the help of advisers from the Department of Agriculture, was designed to "make efficient use of all tillable land and pastures."[20] While these agricultural efforts were helpful, they employed only about thirty or forty men.

Industrial development had always been an aim of the subsistence homestead program. Both the government and the cooperative association hoped to draw manufacturers to Westmoreland since more than 85 percent of the men there had been employed in manufacturing or mining. When private investment failed to materialize, the government lent $325,000 to the cooperative association for the construction of a small garment factory in the community.[21] Built in 1938, the factory was leased to Klee Oppenheimer, a manufacturer of men's pants. By 1940, the factory employed 150 women and forty men. Mary Wolk, an experienced seamstress, was one of the women who worked at the factory. Since it operated on a piecework system, "Some people called it a sweatshop," Wolk said, "But it was wonderful for the people. It helped us a lot." Betty Somers went to work in 1941 when her husband went off to war; she made $12.74 a week toward rent, utilities, and the support of her two children. The pants factory enjoyed moderate success, but was replaced by several other firms over the years.

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[18]Mary Wolk; "Our Community Booster Day," 9.

[19]Beckwith, 4.

[20]Beckwith, 4.

[21]The factory building was designed by architect Alfred H. Marks of Pittsburgh. Construction plans of subsistence homestead programs, 1933-37, microfilm reel 18, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

Now owned by private investors, the garment factory employs approximately 450 people from the area during peak-production periods.[22]

The Cooperative Association also built a one-and-a-half-story brick community building called the Trade Center, whose simple Colonial Revival style was described as being "in keeping with the colonial design employed on the Homestead houses." The Trade Center housed a general store, lunch counter, barber shop, and beauty parlor. Except for the store, which was a cooperative, the operation of these ventures was leased to individuals. Thus Wallace Hoffer applied for the position of community barber, got his own shop, and became a homesteader in the bargain. The Trade Center also housed offices upstairs for the administrative functions of the homestead, as well as a library, doctor, and dentist.[23]

The first store in the community was the Tea Room, a small eatery that operated out of a house in Section A. It was replaced by the general store when the Trade Center opened in 1936. Although it did well enough, the community managers had to encourage some homesteaders to patronize it.

> There are . . . too many homesteaders who, as yet, do not make use of their general store. There is no good reason as to why this condition should apply, as our prices, value considered, are competitive.

And moreover,

> A good percentage of the money spent here is turned over to your own community and put to work for your benefit and convenience . . . You owe it to yourself to deal at the general store if you are not already doing so.[24]

Within a few years business at the general store was booming, and the Trade Center was the hub of the community. The building was destroyed by fire in October 1978.[25]

The community association also operated a Health Club, where several local doctors provided medical care for a fee of $1.50 per month. This entitled a subscriber and his family to house calls, maternity aid, and other general services.[26] The federal government also sent Alma Walker, a nurse, to the community to give immunizations, organize baby clinics, make house calls, and provide basic medical care.[27] Walker was also instrumental in the formation of Norvelt's Mothers' Club, an

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[22]Mary Wolk; Betty Somers, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 30 June 1989, Norvelt; Beckwith, 7; Fifty Years of Progress.

[23]"Our Community Booster Day," 6-7; Beckwith, 5; Fifty Years of Progress.

[24]"Our Community Booster Day," 7.

[25]Fifty Years of Progress.

[26]Charles Somers, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 13 July 1989, Harrisonburg, Va.

[27]Fifty Years of Progress.

organization of the homesteaders' wives that promoted improved nutrition, child care, and family life. The Mothers' Club operated a nursery school, too, where women could leave their children while at work.

In 1933 the division noted in reference to the homesteads that, "Although the legislation of Section 208 is directed largely to economic ends, important social objectives will be served as well." But while social rehabilitation was considered an important element in attaining the success of the subsistence homesteads, the federal government was unsure of its role in achieving that goal. Community manager Ward Beckwith, a government employee, indicated that "social development was sought along two main courses of action, group initiative and participation, and administrative services and functions."[28]

Clubs were the most logical vehicle for social development. The Mothers' Club was only one of twenty-three separate social organizations in Norvelt, including Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, bands, a choral group, the Fireman's Association, Parent-Teacher Association, health club, civic association, Sportsman's Association, church groups, and athletic clubs. There was even "a small, militant group enthusiastically occupied in disagreeing with the policies of the administration, and thoroughly disapproving of the actions and character of the local staff and the board of directors of the Cooperative Association."[29] There were a number of committees, as well, whose job it was to take care of the burial fund, Memorial Day celebrations, movie night, Fireman's Carnival, and community fair. Annual events, the carnival and fair attracted hundreds of people from around the county.

Most of these groups were directed by the Norvelt Activities Council, whose objective was to "promote a friendly and cooperative attitude among all organizations, all homesteaders and their families, and to conduct any business which might be brought before it of a community nature." To achieve full community cooperation, the council included two representatives from each organization or committee, and one representative from each housing section, "except Section A, which gets two because of its size."[30]

From the government's point of view, these organizations were also important for developing "democratic practices" and providing "excellent channels for leadership training, the inculcation of community ideals, and the establishing of patterns of social and recreational activity." The concept that stranded industrial workers lacked social skills was based, to a large extent, on numerous studies of miners, lumbermen, and other groups conducted by federal and private agencies in the 1920s. These studies went a long way toward confirming what social reformers suspected: communities dependent upon one industry and one company for their economic livelihood were not conducive to developing the skills individuals needed to be good citizens. The homestead program intended to fill that perceived social void. As the division explained, the "intensive social and community life" of

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[28]Circular No. 1, 5; Beckwith, 7.

[29]Beckwith, 7.

[30]"Norvelt Activities Council By-Laws," undated, possession of Charles Somers, Harrisonburg, VA.

Westmoreland Homesteads was "one of the most important developments towards the establishment of a pattern of life on a higher plane than is enjoyed by most communities."[31]

COMPLETION AND CONTINUITY

During construction a number of people came to visit and inspect the work in progress, including members of the AFSC, government officials, the Secretary of Agriculture, and a host of others. But the most significant visit occurred after all 254 houses were completed, on May 21, 1937. On that date, in a whirlwind tour planned by various officials of the community, Eleanor Roosevelt and a party of eleven visited typical houses belonging to the Kelley, Riddle, Miller, and Terney families of Section E. Next, Roosevelt visited the school, where she spoke with the local children, including young Anthony Wolk, Jr. Then it was on to the cooperative farm, the dairy barn, chicken range, store, and factory. And then she went up and down the streets, stopping periodically and emerging from the big, black Cadillac to speak with homesteaders. At one point, the First Lady made a special detour to Helen White's house in Section D. "Mrs. Roosevelt came," said White, "To see how I was getting along." And so it went for most of the day. When it was over, the First Lady remarked, "[The community] is very well planned and the homes are well constructed. The homes are a great deal better than many I have seen." While impressed with the physical appearance of the place, Roosevelt and others were concerned about the lack of employment and educational opportunities for young people. Within a year of her visit, the community had a new school building and a factory. In fall 1937, when the new post office at Westmoreland Homesteads needed a name, the local newsletter "The Homestead Informer" held a contest. The winning entry was NORVELT, derived from the last syllables of the First Lady's name, in gratitude for her continued interest and support.[32]

By the 1940s, the government was under increased pressure to sell off its subsistence homesteads. In 1944, Norvelt was turned over to the Federal Public Housing Authority, which sold it to the Homestead Association of Westmoreland on December 1, 1945. The Homestead Association sold all of the units to individual homesteaders by June 30, 1946. Responding to criticisms of the program, Walter Funkhouser, Norvelt's last community manager, reminded neighboring Westmoreland County residents that homesteads were an experimental means of achieving economic rehabilitation of industrial workers, but not the only means. "Who can say what it is worth to put a project of this kind in a mining community as a demonstration of a new way of life?" he asked.[33] With a waiting list of fifty families who wanted homesteads, Funkhouser and others considered the community a moderate success, but whether the government would ever attempt such an experiment again seemed doubtful to all.

In establishing these demonstration communities, the federal government attempted to provide everything that was necessary for community life, including shelter, food, employment, medical care,

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[31]Beckwith, 7, 8.

[32]Greensburg Morning Review, 21 May 1937; Greensburg Tribune Review 16 December 1984; Fifty Years of Progress.

[33]Andrew Evancho to Arthur Taylor, 22 April 1946, and Walter L. Funkhouser to Arthur Taylor, April 16, 1946, Box 58, Federal Public Housing Authority, Record Group 207, National Archives; Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph, 29 August 1944.

education, and recreation. From the initial planning stages to the sale of the last house, the creators of Westmoreland Homesteads experienced difficulties of leadership, implementation, construction, and finances. But despite the tremendous amount of controversy engendered by the project, its participants rose to the challenge and proved the skeptics wrong: with help and guidance, destitute families could and did gain some degree of economic security and an improved standard of living. In 1987 the Norvelt Anniversary Committee credited two factors for the community's success. First the homesteaders themselves: "We owe so much to our homestead settlers. Their hard work and ambition have made Norvelt what it is today. We have progressed from muddy roads and a bare landscape to a beautiful little town with tall trees, neat and well-cared-for lawns, and homes that are much improved since those early days." And secondly, their greatest advocate: "A kind and thoughtful lady [who] wanted to see us succeed and become useful and self-sufficient citizens . . . Eleanor Roosevelt."[34] Not to be overlooked, however, are the planners and idealists, such as M. L. Wilson and Clarence Pickett, who conceived and implemented a bold idea in housing reform.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

Working closely with government architects, Bartholomew designed simple, one-and-a-half-story, frame houses. With dormer windows, gable roofs, shutters, and front porches, the houses exhibit qualities of colonial-era, Pennsylvania farmhouses, heeding the Division of Subsistence Homesteads' guidelines that the designs reflect indigenous architecture. The newspaper described them as "the Pennsylvania farm house type," while the homesteaders called them "Cape Cod cottage in design." There were five plans: a four-room house, a six-room house, and three five-room houses. Bartholomew's contract called for the plans to have "provisions for future extensions"; although these are not evident in the drawings, numerous additions to Norvelt houses over the last fifty years exhibit the flexibility of the basic design. All the houses had cyprus siding, red-cedar shingles, plumbing, and central hot-air heat.[35]

Bartholomew's response to the guidelines issued by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads is effective. The buildings are part of the landscape, set in harmonious relation to each other, due to the curvilinear plans. The division called for variation in design, and with five basic plans, all of which could be reversed, Bartholomew essentially provided ten different designs.

One of the first was for a four-room house labeled Type 401. Featuring a front porch inset under the gable roof, Type 401 soon lost favor--probably because of the square footage lost to the porch--and was built only in Sections A and B. Type 401 was replaced by Type 402, noticeably larger, but still containing only about 750 square feet of space. The three five-room designs--Types 501, 502, and 503--had L-shaped plans. Types 501 and 503 had about 815 square feet, while Type 502 was larger, with about 835 square feet. The six-room plan, Type 601, had the same footprint as 502, but squeezed a child's bedroom into the attic above the ell, giving it a total of four bedrooms.

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[34]Fifty Years of Progress.

[35]Greensburg Morning Review, 2 August 1934; "Our Community Booster Day," 14; U.S. Department of Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, "General Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads," Circular 1 (1933), 3.

All the designs included a bathroom, located on the first or second floor. None had a dining room, but the kitchen was large enough to eat in. The living room was centrally located, with direct entrance from the outside, so that it formed part of the circulation pattern. The rear entry opened into a utility room or hallway, so that muddy shoes could be shed in a neutral place. In the five- and six-room plans, there was a bedroom on the first floor. As children grew up and left home, this downstairs bedroom was often converted to a dining room or sitting room, or was opened into the living room to make that room larger. The second-floor bedrooms had separate access from the hall, except in the six-room plan, where the "child's room" with steep sloping roofs was reached through another bedroom.

The houses were equipped with heat, water, and electricity. The concrete basement contained the hot-air furnace, which had ducts leading to floor registers, and a coal bin for its fuel. Water was piped in from an artesian well, and electricity was provided by the local public utility. These were additional costs for the occupant, as was the telephone. Because telephone-installment costs were high, most families used the telephone at the community building.

D. Site:

1. **Historic landscape design:** The 1,492-acre plot of land that would become Westmoreland Homesteads was already somewhat developed; it had five farmhouses, a network of roads, and several railroad lines cutting through it. Bartholomew subdivided 772 acres into 254 housing lots, ranging in size from 1.6 to seven acres, arranging them in four curvilinear sections and two smaller, linear ones. The remaining 720 acres were set aside as a cooperative farm surrounding the residential area. In the center of the community, thirteen acres were reserved for common facilities such as a twenty-room schoolhouse, athletic fields, playground, post office, and community buildings. The site was hilly and varied, but changed less than 100' in elevation, and the roads respected this topography. With house lots radiating from the curving roads, the houses were seen obliquely. Because of the variety of buildings and their picturesque arrangement, the repetitive designs of the houses never became monotonous.

2. **Outbuildings:** Each house was provided with the following outbuildings: garage, poultry house, and a grape arbor linking them.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Graphic Material:**

Construction plans of subsistence homestead programs, 1933-1937. Microfilmed. Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Farm Security Administration photographs, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Additional historic photographs are reproduced in A Tribute to Norvelt and Her First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt: Fifty Years of Progress. Norvelt: privately printed, 1985.

B. Interviews of Norvelt Residents:

Conducted by Margaret M. Mulrooney:

Jay Hoffer, 30 June 1989
Mary Wolk, 30 June 1989
Helen White, 30 June 1989
Betty Somers, 30 June 1989
Charles and Kay Somers, 13 July 1989 (Harrisonburg, VA)

Conducted by Alison K. Hoagland:

Gail Hoffer, 7 May 1991
Kathy Kelley, 7 May and 24 June 1991
Mary Wolk, 7 May 1991
John and Elizabeth Novotny, 24 June 1991

C. Bibliography:

Beckwith, Ward. "Westmoreland Homesteads After Five Years of Growth." Norvelt, Pennsylvania, 20 November 1940.

Bilik, Edward M. "The History of Westmoreland (Norvelt) Homesteads." B.S. thesis, St. Vincent College, 1952.

Coleman, Beverly M., to John B. Demich, Acting Chief, Community Organization Section, 14 April 1936, Box 29, Farm Security Administration files, Record Group 207, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Correspondence. Farm Security Administration and Public Housing Administration, Record Group 207. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Correspondence. Records of Cooperative Associations, Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Greensburg Morning Review.

Greensburg Tribune Review.

"Norvelt Activities Council By-Laws." undated, possession of Charles Somers, Harrisonburg, Va.

"Our Community Booster Day," Westmoreland Homesteads, Norvelt, Pennsylvania, 7 November 1937.

Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph.

Tatum, Sandra L., and Roger W. Moss. Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985.

A Tribute to Norvelt and Her First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt: Fifty Years of Progress. Norvelt: privately printed, 1985.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. Resettlement Administration. Resettlement Division. "Justification for Westmoreland Homesteads, SH-PA-3." 26 May 1937. Box 51, Public Housing Administration, Record Group 207. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

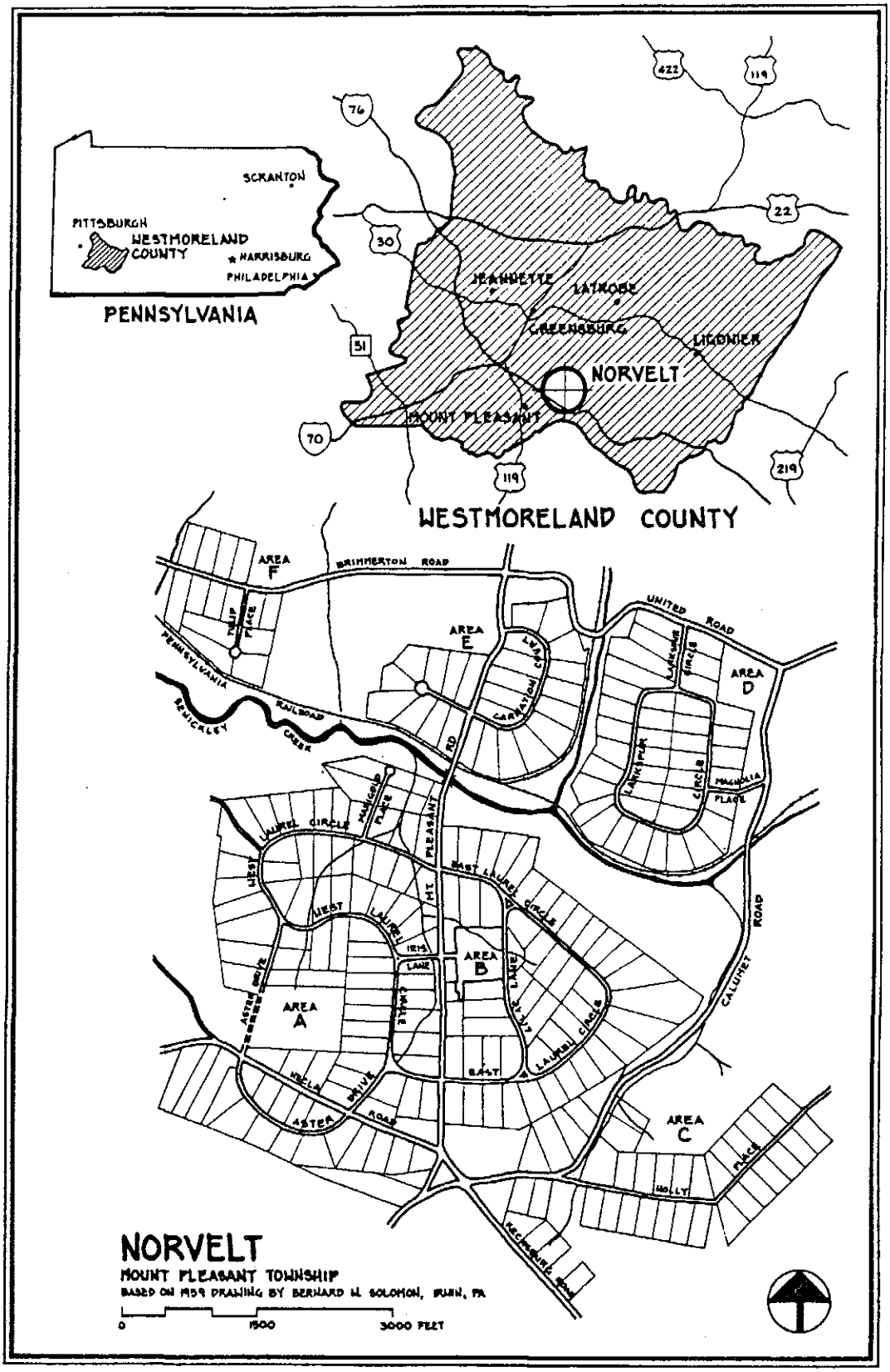
U.S. Farm Security Administration. "Facts About Westmoreland Homesteads." [1938?].

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

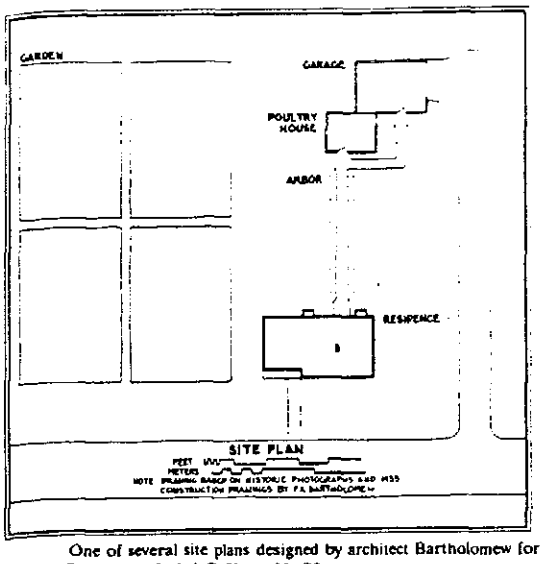
This report is part of a larger project undertaken in 1989 to document the towns of Penn-Craft and Norvelt, Pennsylvania. The project was initiated by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randall Cooley, executive director. Both HABS/HAER and AIHP are agencies of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The project was prepared by Margaret M. Mulrooney, HABS historian, and Alison K. Hoaglund, HABS senior historian. Isabel Yang, HABS architect, produced the architectural drawings, and David Ames of the University of Delaware took the large-format photographs in 1991. The information contained within this report was originally published as Norvelt and Penn-Craft, Pennsylvania: Subsistence-Homestead Communities of the 1930s (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1991). This manuscript also contains historic photographs of Norvelt, Penn-Craft, and other government subsistence homesteads.

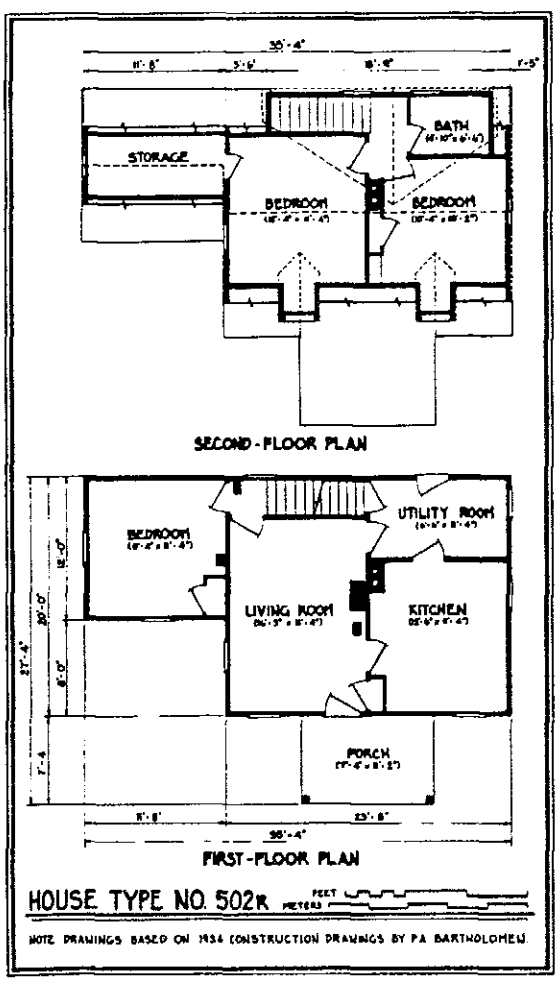
Other HABS documents produced from the original published project include HABS No. PA-5919, Subsistence-Homestead Towns, Penn-Craft, Fayette County, and Norvelt, Westmoreland County Pennsylvania; and HABS No. PA-5920, Town of Penn-Craft, Penn-Craft, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, held at the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Additional research material, 35mm field photographs and historic views have been forwarded to the AIHP Collection within the Special Collections Division of the Stapleton Library at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



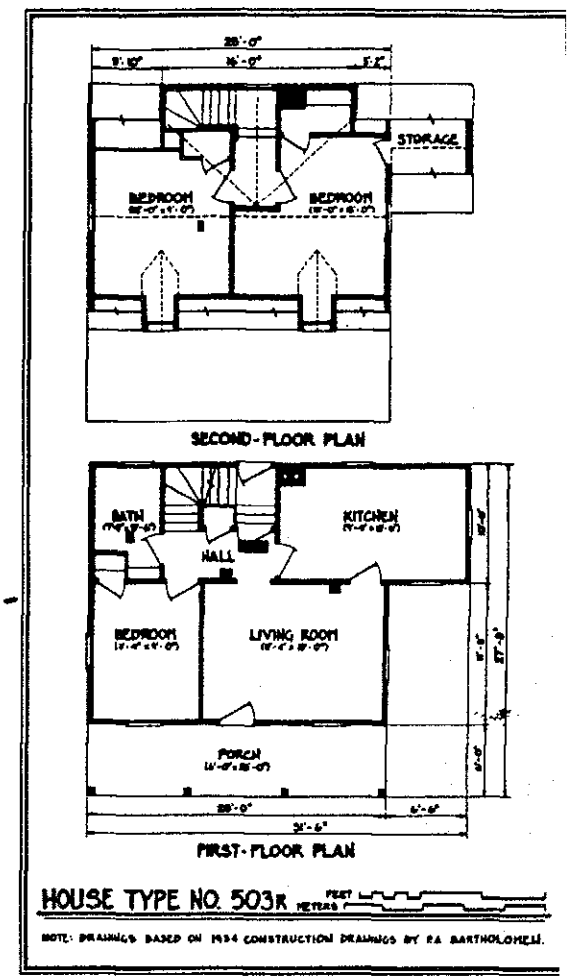
Site plan of Norvelt. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.



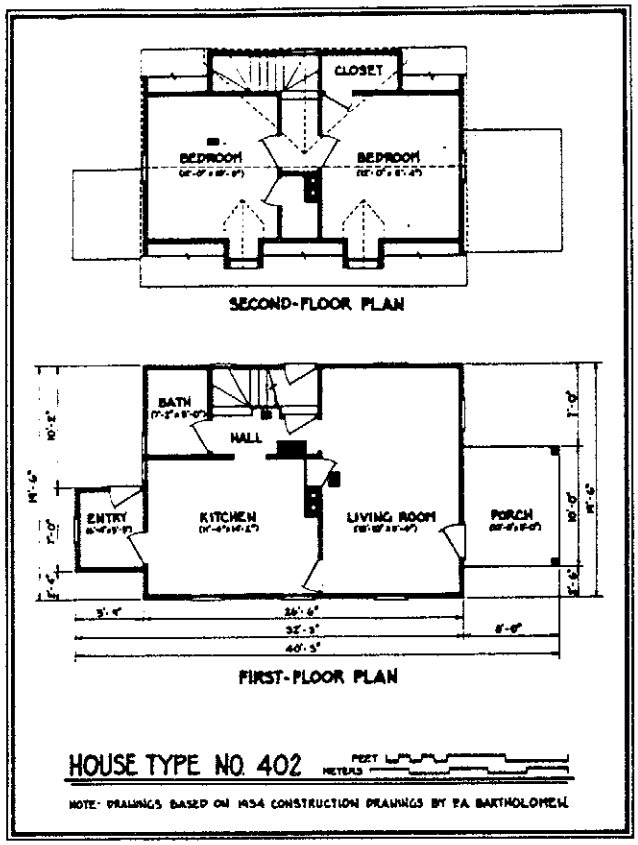
One of several site plans designed by architect Bartholomew for Norvelt. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.



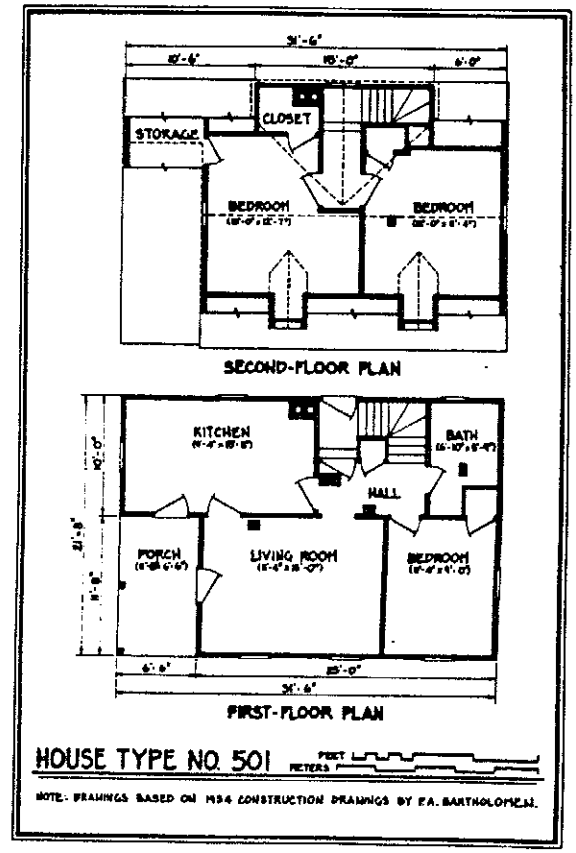
Plans of Type 502R house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.



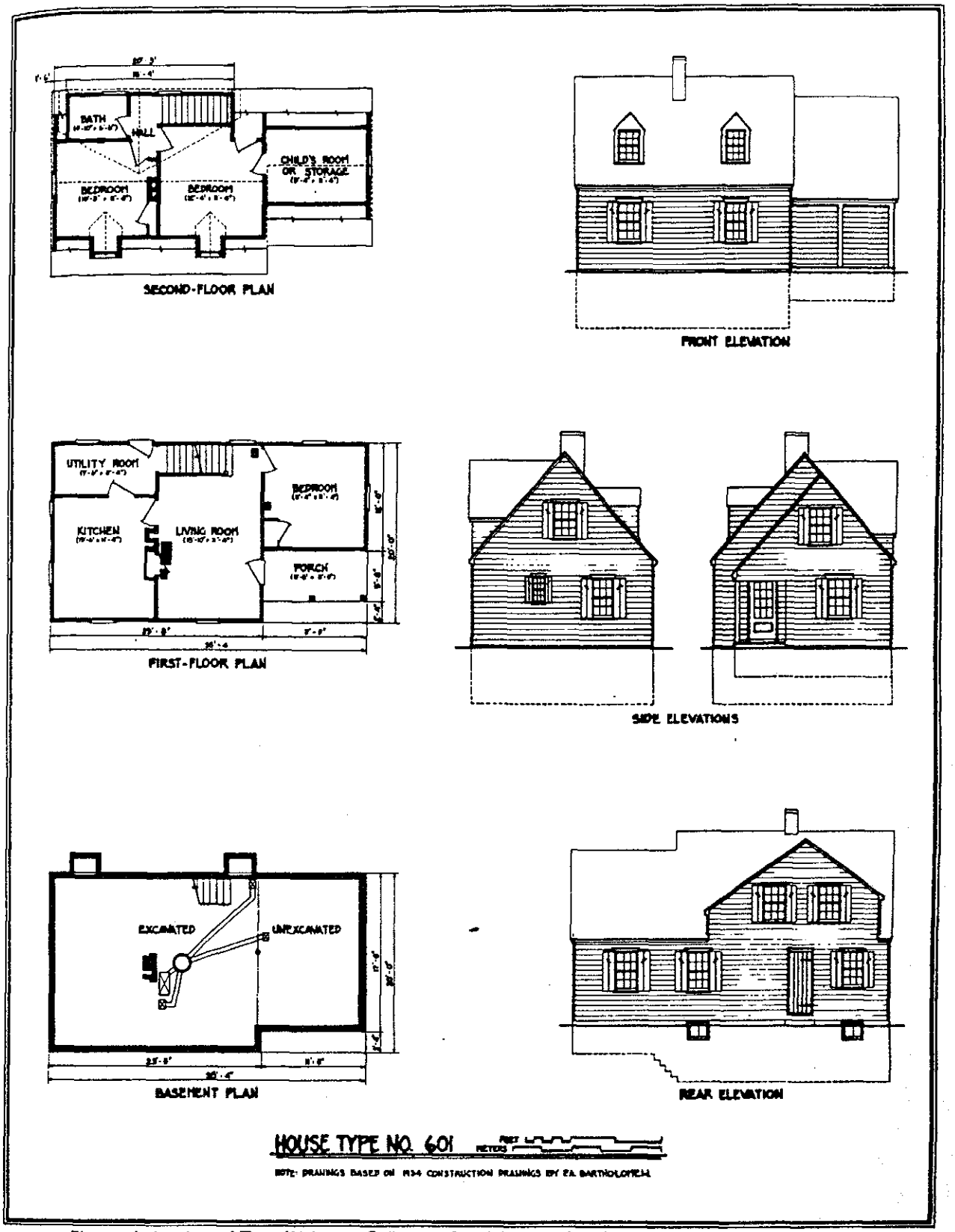
Plans of Type 503R house. Delineator: Isab C. Yang, HABS.



Plans of Type 402 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.



Plans of Type 501 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.



Plans and elevations of Type 601 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.